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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [CG](#) [ELECTIONS](#)
SUBJECT: CATHOLIC BISHOPS CALL FOR MASSIVE PARTICIPATION IN
DRC ELECTIONS

REF: A. KINSHASA 1197

[1](#)B. KINSHASA 1178

[1](#)1. (U) The influential National Episcopal Conference of Congo (CENCO) called upon all Congolese to vote in massive numbers in the upcoming October 29 presidential runoff and provincial assembly elections, but maintained that the Catholic Church (as well as CENCO itself) will remain neutral in the second-round balloting between President Joseph Kabila and Vice President Jean-Pierre Bemba. The message, signed October 5 after a three-day meeting of the DRC's bishops and archbishops, called for the elections to take place in peace and order, and urged the international community to take all measures possible to ensure the vote is organized under the best possible conditions since the DRC finds itself now "in danger." CENCO did not sign a similar statement in July issued by the heads of the DRC's major religious groups (ref A).

[1](#)2. (U) The CENCO bishops condemned any act of violence as well as any appeals to hatred, division or exclusion, urging their followers to reject any attempts to "balkanize" the fragile country. The statement appealed to voters to not give in to the "intoxication" and "manipulation" of media and politicians attempting to lead people towards violence. CENCO further called upon all to accept the "verdict of the ballot boxes" and reject any potential confrontation arising from election results.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Comment: CENCO's position is a welcome since before the July 30 vote, it had expressed its reservations about the fairness and legitimacy of the electoral process. This apparent vote of confidence in the electoral process itself, on the part of a widely-respected body, could help reduce tension as election results become known after October 29. Moreover, Catholic churches throughout the country are sending out strong messages each Sunday calling on Congolese to choose their leaders wisely and to avoid all calls to violence. End comment.
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